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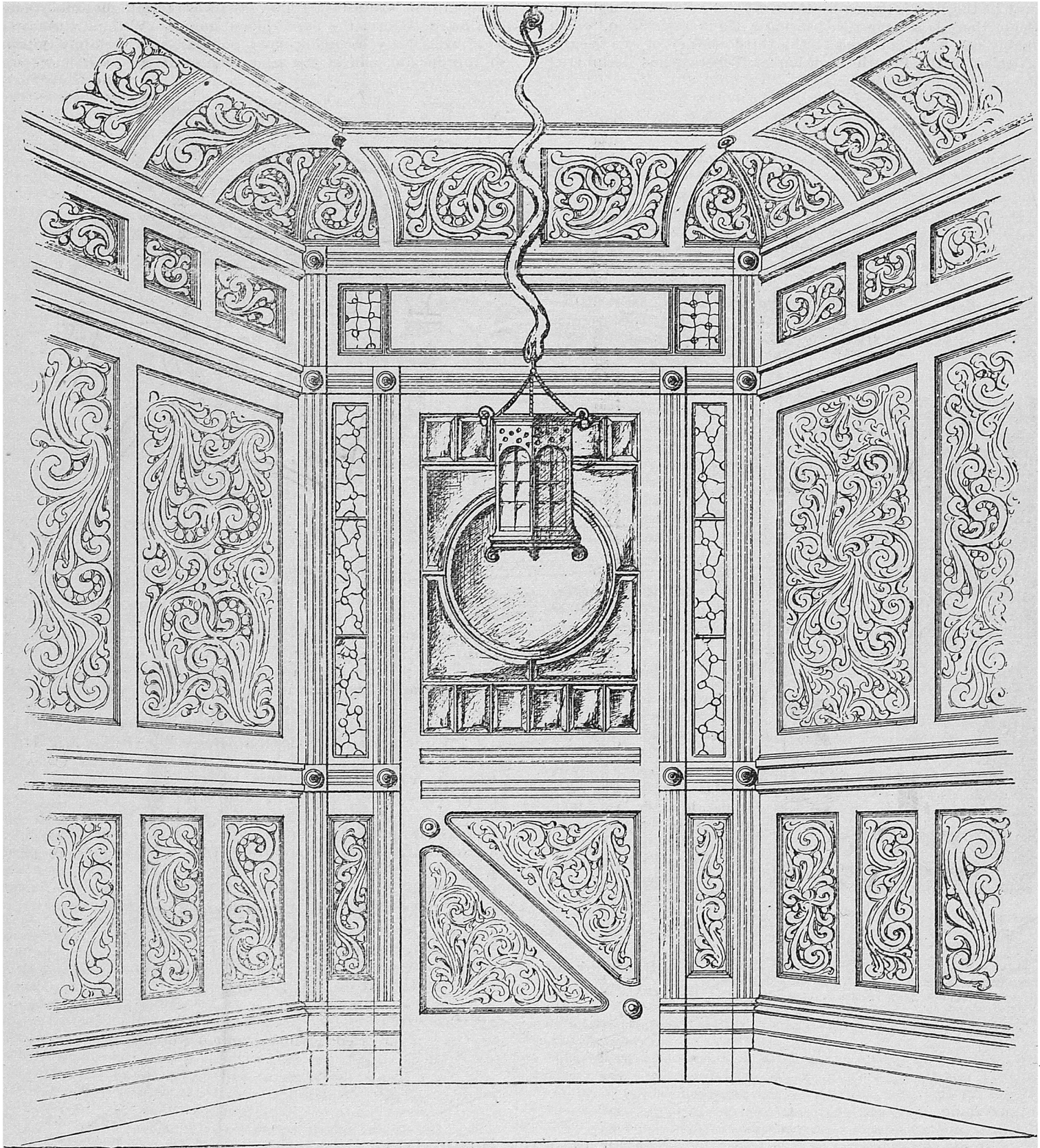
THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

PERSIAN TILES.

BY B. L. LAMPREY.

THERE is perhaps no study more fascinating than evolution; the tracing of an effect to its primary origin; and after mankind itself, probable art affords the broadest field for this interesting labor. Regarding the great works, we all worship at the same shrine, and prostrate ourselves with one accord before the old masters. We stand to gaze, with profound reverence and admiration, at the great roots and branches of art, but there

and claim it for ours. We infringe upon the patents of past generations, convert them to our own uses, stamp them A1, all modern improvements, and then give ourselves a congratulatory shake, at our wonderful originality and progress, often forgetting in our very just and loyal pride that we are, to a greater or less extent, but imitators of a dead past, reviving arts and customs which were created and lost again before we were thought of. Apropos of the subject of this article, how many of us, upon admiring a beautifully tiled hearth, the exquisite mural decoration of a vestibule, the intricacies of a mosaic ceiling, or the dainty tiling of my lady's bath, stop to consider that many hundred years ago, the now buried city of Rhages decorated its walls,



VESTIBULE, DESIGNED BY THE WADE MOSAIC INLAY CO.

are many twigs and minor shoots, whose beauty we accept and enjoy, but whose origin we fail to trace back to the parent stem. This is largely due to our egotism of the present, which is colossal, satisfying and all-absorbing; which reaches forward in the future and backward into the past, making everything its own. We talk complacently of what our children will do years hence, and comfortably appropriate what other people's children did years ago. We stretch out an enterprising hand, and draw unto ourselves the work of some by-gone age, ruthlessly brush off the cob-webs, shine it up with a little nineteenth century varnish,

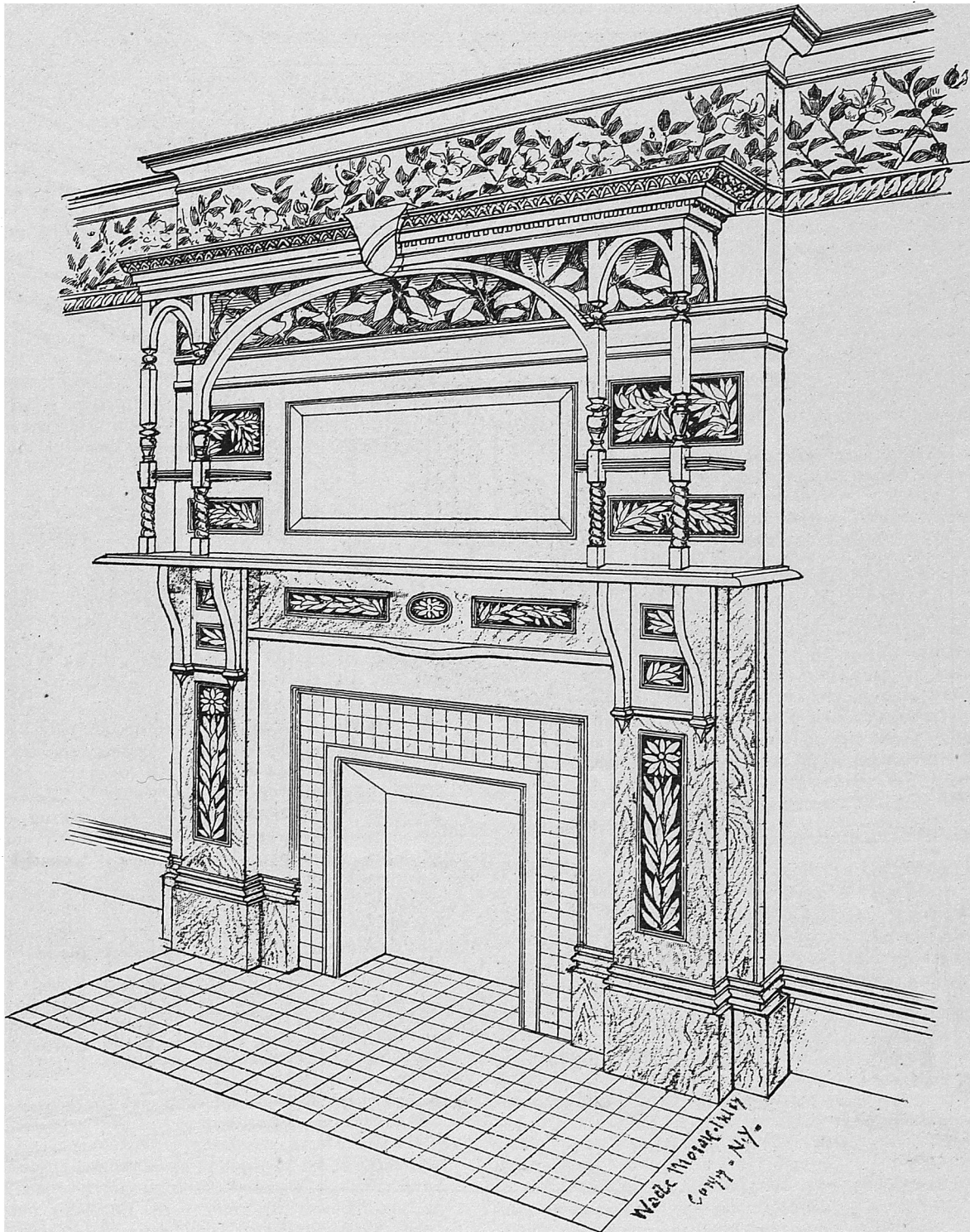
ceilings and floors in the self same way, and that it is to the Persians we owe the custom of tiling, at once so useful and ornamental. The materials employed by the Persians, being of a somewhat perishable nature, only a few specimens remain of that art belonging to the years immediately following the Arab conquest, but among these, the oldest seem to be the beautiful lustrous *tiles à reflet métallique*, so called from their likeness to a very peculiar earthenware of that name, which was made in Persia probably two thousand years ago. Of these very old tiles none seem to have been made since the time of Shah Abbas,

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whose reign ended A. D. 1628, and the mode of their manufacture is now numbered among the lost arts. Chardin, to whom we are indebted for the most valuable researches, describes these tiles as of the greatest beauty. At first they seem to have been made with smooth, even surfaces, but later, inscriptions and ornamentations in relief were added. From the dates and texts thus inscribed, it is gathered that this peculiar make of tile was chiefly used during the time of the Mogul Sovereigns, A. D. 1072 down to A. D. 1628, and formed both interior and exterior decorations of monuments, tombs and mosques. Some of them are very large, being six or eight feet in length, while others are small, and so shaped and fitted as to form a mosaic. Very few of them have ever been brought into Europe, and those were undoubtedly gained in the first instance by theft. In the South Kensington Museum there is a large tile, bearing a Kufic inscription, which probably can be dated back to the third century of the Hegra. M. Nicolas, of the French Legation at Teheran, has deciphered

due respect to the profession, the same might be said to-day of photography, for wherever man may go, there he is almost sure to find the bright-eyed little camera, busily engaged in seizing upon anything within its reach. The Mohammedans have a court photographer, and when the Shah made his pilgrimage to the holy shrines, this individual formed one of the escort, and there upon consecrated ground he set up the little machine and photographed the sacred pile. Some of these photos were carried into England, and from them can be gathered a faint idea of the magnificent originals.

Although the old art of making tiles has passed away, those of modern manufacture are still abundantly used in Persia, for the gateways of cities, caravansaries, public buildings, etc. Some of them bear exquisite designs, others are cunningly proportioned and fitted, to form the parti-colored mosaic. With us, the custom of tiling is daily becoming more popular, and certainly nothing so appropriate, and at the same time so artistic, could be found



MANTEL IN WADE MOSAIC INLAY.

the inscription as follows: "God who hears and sees. There is no God but God. Mohomet is his prophet, Ali is his lieutenant. The victory comes from God." It is a cause of much regret that Persian prejudice bars the doors of all her sacred buildings against the European, so that a study of the ancient tiles still existing in these places is denied the traveler. At the holy shrines of Meshed and Kerbela the tilings of the mosque domes, prayer niches, etc., are said to be wonderfully beautiful, and of such dazzling lustre that they shine in the light like polished metal. It has somewhere been said, that if man were to travel miles into the wilderness, or to seek the solitude of a desert isle, he would, upon arriving, find the devil there before him. With all

for the uses to which it is put. It is a trite saying that "history repeats itself," and yet its truth assumes new force each time that we thus unearth from the dim recesses of the past those things which may be traced through all the intervening ages, into the broad light of the practical present.

THE names and dates on antique furniture are seldom to be relied on, these, in many cases, having been carved or branded or appearing on panels obtained and inserted from fragments of other furniture at the instance of European dealers to enhance the value of the article.